

5th Day.]

STANDING COMMITTEE.

[8 June, 1911.]

Mr. MALAN : It would mean that. If this proposal is accepted it would mean that the Conference then becomes advisory to the Secretary of State here; because you cannot give different functions to a Committee of this Conference to what the Conference has itself; and if you state in condition 2 that it is advisory of the Secretary of State, and in condition 3 that it is a Committee of this Conference, it seems to me that the Conference itself then becomes merely advisory of the Secretary of State. I know that is not the intention, and that is why I say we do not understand exactly what this proposal would lead to.

Then, what is going to be the relation of this Committee to this Conference? General Botha has discussed that matter fairly fully. Will the members of this Committee become members of this Conference; and, if not, will they not have a right to complain, and say: "We prepare things, and then we have not the opportunity of presenting our views to the Conference. We advise one thing and the Conference decides differently, and we have not had the opportunity of stating our views directly"? If, on the other hand, you are going to put men representing the Dominions and the United Kingdom on to this Conference, it seems to me that you are very seriously interfering with the function of this Conference, and that certainly should not be allowed. Then we have very great difficulty as regards the personnel of this Committee. If we take the High Commissioners, then we put on, along with Ministers and political men, permanent officials. As regards the United Kingdom, it does not matter very much, because the Secretary of State, or two Secretaries of State who are responsible to their Government, would always be present and be members of this Committee; but as regards the Dominions it would be quite different, and our only representative would be an official.

Now, supposing this official is only to be the mouthpiece of his Government, and not to express his own mind or his own opinion about any particular subject, what, then, is the good of him being there? You might as well send your information through the Secretary of State in the ordinary way, as is done now. If the representative, on the other hand, is to express his own opinion apart from the advice which he receives from his Government, then it is very possible that he will compromise his Government. Supposing he always speaks with the mind of his Government and there is a change of Government out in the Dominion and a new Government comes in, and speaks with a different voice from the old Government, are you to remove your official then? Is he going to be in the same position as a Minister, or are you going to say to Jacob: "You must now speak with the voice of Esau"? So that it seems to me you must either decide between having a paid official—and then I do not see any advantage over the existing system—or you must have a Minister. If you have a Minister you say here that he must represent Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, or Newfoundland. How is he to be elected? By the Government? Then he is the mouthpiece only of the Government and not necessarily of the whole colony.

The Prime Minister, when he opened this Conference, said that we leave party politics at the door. Very well. Still we are in our own Dominions party politicians; but, regarding the fact that you have the Prime Ministers here, and that this is a Prime Ministers' Conference, you expect of those men when they come here that they will take a broader view, not of their own party in their own Dominions, but of their whole country, and also of the whole Empire, and it is the broader view, and the Imperial view, which is to predominate at this table. You cannot expect that from officials, and I do not think we should give any such power to a Committee such as is proposed here. As regards the personnel of it, as I say, we will have very great difficulty. You might appoint a man who is very pushful, who thinks that the Imperial Conference, with the full responsibility upon them, do not press the thing quite as strongly as it should be done, and says: "We do not look to the men who have sent us here; we are permanent officials, and we will press the thing." They might put the Imperial Government here as well as the Governments of the Dominions in a very awkward position indeed. It is sometimes felt necessary at a Conference of this kind to pass a resolution. It is not always found advisable to give immediate effect to it. When the Conference has adjourned, they may find that more light is thrown on the subject, or they may find by a little delay public opinion will be ripened, and as responsible Ministers, being in touch with public opinion in their own Do-